

Wednesday, March 15, 2000



Senior Center Approved

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

By a vote of 327 to 114, town meeting approved a new senior center at the Saturday session.

The cost of the center will be \$2,030,000 as project bids were opened last week. Plans call for a two-story, 12,700 square foot shingle-style building with parking for 60 cars. It will be adjacent to the cemetery on three-and-a-half wooded acres at the corner of Mayflower and Tremont St. The building will be set back 170 ft from Tremont St.

and 90 feet from Mayflower with the entrance off that road. It will cost between \$250,000 to \$300,000 to operate annually.

Supporters of article 13 felt the town should give something back to its senior citizens. Joan Wright of Stone Gate Lane said: "Many of the seniors who live in this town made it the town that we want to live in. Unless tragedy prevents it, we're all going to be seniors some day. I urge your support."

Marjorie McLean of Lincoln St., a resident since 1969 who is now widowed, also supported the center. "I look forward to having a senior center in my town, and I predict that many of you in the room today will grow to like the senior center and use the senior center," she said.

Selectman Margaret Kearney, who has championed elder affairs for years and was a part of the center's building committee, said if voters could spend \$20 million for the school budget, then they should spend \$2 million for the senior center, because "seniors have helped supplement the education budget, some for a number of years."

Town Meeting 2000

To detractors, most of whom argued against the proposed size of the building, Kearney said: "People will say it's too large. It isn't too large. This building has been planned to meet the needs of seniors for several years."

The 1999 town census shows there are 2,604 people 60-years-old or older and almost 2,500 who are between 50-59 years old. The Council on Aging served 1,360 people and transported 580 people in a year. COA members believe that many more people will take advantage of a new senior center once it is built, and they wanted a building that they would not quickly outgrow.

Will Zachmann of Standish St. told town meeting:

"Frankly, I'm looking forward to playing checkers there myself," but he

wondered if 60 parking spaces would be enough for community events. The COA said there is room for expanded parking in the plans.

Many of the opponents of the article said they were not against a senior center but were dismayed at the size of the building.

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Bill Campbell
Council on Aging

Anne Thomas of Deer Path Trail North said: "I feel I have to say yes to this design today or no to a senior center."

Greg Hunter of King Caesar Rd. said he wished the COA had presented other plans showing small, medium and large size buildings. "I don't like to say no to seniors, but I think we should vote down the senior center," Hunter said.

President of the COA's building committee Bill Campbell said his group wanted to bring exact figures to the voters and keep the project under \$2 million.

"We felt it was important to come to town meeting and give you firm numbers," said Campbell. "We had a budget of \$2 million and we wanted to give the town a facility for the least amount of money."

An amendment to article 13 by Neal Merry to add a full

basement to the plans failed. Merry said: "No basement is, in my view, false economy."

The COA's architect, John Katlan, said including a full basement used for programs would increase the building's cost by over \$1.1 million, re-

quire up to \$115,000 extra to redesign and re-bid and would delay the project three to four months.

The COA must raise an additional \$300,000 - \$500,000 to furnish the building, which will contain a large multi-purpose room for dining for up to 200 people, health and counseling offices, classrooms, two arts and crafts rooms, a fitness area, a conference room, a reading lounge and a gift shop.

The COA is hoping that community groups will use the building in the evenings and on weekends and have asked selectmen to appoint a committee to work out usage.

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**- Marjorie McLean
Lincoln Street**